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Honors Humanities

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The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

Chapter 17-20

**Summary:**

The final section of the novel opens with Dorian Gray spending time with Henry and the Duchess of Monmouth. Dorian thought all was well and James had been outsmarted by him. That is until Dorian sees James following him one night. For three days Dorian stayed in his house, away from society for fear that James would come after him. On the third day he ventured out to the country with Henry and a shooting party. He had a feeling that the men would hit something not intended to be hit and as the shot rang out a shrill scream rang through the air.

He was right. From the trees fell a man, who was later identified by Dorian as James Vane (without the other men’s knowledge). Dorian believed all his troubles were gone and that he could become a new person. Throughout many attempts at restoring his old character whether it be in sparing the heart of a poor girl or standing up against Henry. Little did he know his good actions would be his down fall.

The picture tormented Dorian still, through his new aura. As he began to improve his action he imagined the picture would improve too. He ventured up to the library and removed the curtain that was concealing the portrait. With one glimpse his body was taken over by fear and horror. His reaction was to destroy the picture, destroy all that held him down and destroyed his livelihood. In the final moments of the novel Dorian reaches for the knife he took Basil’s life with, and stabbed the portrait in the heart. In the end killing himself and any chances he had at becoming humane once more.

**Analysis:**

I was on the edge of my seat the entire time I was reading this. I wanted to know Dorian’s fate and see how karma came back to “bite him in the butt.” After chapter 18 I had my ideas about how it would happen, and by the end of the novel my suspicions became reality. The pieces fit together perfectly and in the end Dorian’s unintentional suicide was the greatest melodramatic death of all time.

**Application:**

Human roles and behaviors can be seen in the actions and positions the community places the characters into. For example, in chapter 20, Dorian walked past two men who said, “This is Dorian Gray.” After this he begins to reminisce on how he used to feel important and noble when men would recognize him on the streets. In the present he said he grew tired of hearing his name uttered by men. Behaviors can be seen in chapter 18, when Dorian is with the shooting party and he screams, “Don’t shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live.” Dorian felt something bad was going to happen and therefore spoke out to try and end it. His character changed drastically throughout the novel and this is just one of the ways one could prove that human roles and behaviors change over time.

Human nature is seen solely through the actions of the characters. In chapter 17 Henry worries about Dorian because he fell ill at dinner. He speaks to Dorian in a loving tone saying, “…you had better not come down to dinner…” He cares about the health of his friend and is trying excessively to ensure he is alright.

Human ideals are seen in the changes Dorian Gray is so desperate to make. He wants more than anything in the world to be the person he once was, and not resemble the man in his portrait. In chapter 20, right before his accidental suicide, Dorian tries in desperation one last time to rid the world of what caused his change. He values how he is viewed so much, that his values ultimately become his demise.